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A Study of Civilization, Savagery, and Human Nature in *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding

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Abstract

William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) is a dystopian allegory set during a global war, where a group of British schoolboys stranded on a deserted island attempt to govern themselves. What begins as an attempt at order and rescue quickly collapses into fear, violence, and murder. Through character allegory, symbolism, and major themes like the loss of innocence, mob mentality, and inherent evil, Golding argues that civilization is only a thin layer over humanity's primal savage instincts. This paper analyzes the plot, characters, themes, and symbols to demonstrate how the novel presents a pessimistic view of human nature and the fragility of society.

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Introduction

Lord of the Flies was written in the aftermath of World War II. Golding, having witnessed human cruelty on a mass scale, asked a fundamental question: _What is man like in a state of nature, free from laws and society?

His answer is unsettling. A plane carrying British schoolboys crashes on an uninhabited island. With no adults, the boys elect Ralph as leader and set rules: build shelters, keep a signal fire, and use a conch to maintain order. But as fear of a "beast" grows and Jack's desire for power increases, the island descends into tribalism and bloodshed.

The island becomes a microcosm of the adult world. Through this, Golding shows that evil is not external, but exists within every human heart.

1. **Beginning:** Ralph and Piggy find a conch and gather the boys. Ralph is elected chief. Jack leads the hunters. They decide to keep a signal fire for rescue.
2. **Rising Conflict:** The boys become distracted. The fire goes out and a ship passes. Ralph and Jack argue. Fear of a "beast" spreads, especially among the littluns.
3. **Split:** A dead parachutist lands on the mountain. Sam and Eric mistake it for the beast. Jack challenges Ralph and loses, then leaves to form his own tribe.

4. **Descent into Savagery:** Jack kills a pig and puts its head on a stake as an offering-the "*Lord of the Flies*." Simon has a vision where the head tells him the beast is inside every person. Simon is killed by the boys in a frenzied dance.
5. **Climax:** Jack's tribe raids Ralph's camp, steals Piggy's glasses, and kills Piggy with a boulder that also shatters the conch. Ralph is hunted.
6. **Ending:** Jack sets the island on fire to smoke Ralph out. A British naval officer arrives because of the fire. The boys are rescued, but they weep, realizing the evil they are capable of.

Themes

The Struggle to Build Civilization vs Savagery

This is the central conflict. Ralph and Piggy prioritize shelters, the signal fire, and democratic meetings. Jack prioritizes hunting, fun, and immediate rewards. Building society is hard and boring. Savagery is exciting. As a result, boys slowly abandon Ralph for Jack. Even Ralph is tempted. The novel shows that maintaining civilization requires constant effort, while savagery is the natural default.

Loss of Innocence

The boys arrive as orderly, well-behaved children. By the end, they are painted warriors who hunt and kill.

Golding shows this is not corruption from outside. It is the unveiling of what was already inside. The peaceful glade where Simon first sits is later defiled by the bloody pig's head. This symbolizes how innate evil destroys childhood innocence.

Man's Inherent Evil

The novel's most disturbing claim: evil is not taught, it is inborn.

Jack starts with a sense of rules but chooses violence. Ralph and Piggy, who fight to stay civilized, still join in Simon's murder. Roger has no sense of morality at all.

Only Simon resists. He recognizes the beast is "perhaps the darkness and innate brutality within the boys." But the group kills him for it. Golding suggests goodness exists, but it is rare and fragile.

Dangers of Mob Mentality

The boys commit their worst acts as a group. The chant "Kill the pig. Cut her throat" turns murder into a ritual. Warpaint erases individual identity.

Fear of the beast is used to justify violence. This mob mindset leads directly to Simon's death and the hunt for Ralph. The novel warns how easily individuals surrender responsibility to the group.

War and the Adult World

Set during a global war, the novel parallels the boys' conflict with the war outside. A dead paratrooper lands on the island. In the end, the boys are rescued by a naval officer from a world that is itself burning. Golding's point: children and adults are not different. Both are capable of the same savagery.

The Conch Shell

Represents order, democracy, and civilization. Whoever holds it may speak. As savagery rises, it loses power. When Roger's boulder kills Piggy and shatters the conch, it signals the complete collapse of law.

Piggy's Glasses

Symbolize science and rational thought. Used to make fire. When stolen by Jack, Ralph's group loses the power to signal and survive.

The Signal Fire

Represents the boys' connection to civilization and hope of rescue. When it burns low, they have given up on being saved. Ironically, they are rescued not by the signal fire, but by Jack's destructive fire.

The Beast

The imaginary monster the boys fear. Simon realizes the truth: "the beast" is the savagery inside each of them. As the boys act more savagely, their belief in the beast grows stronger.

The Lord of the Flies

The severed pig's head on a stake. It speaks to Simon and tells him evil is in every human heart. "*Lord of the Flies*" is a translation of Beelzebub, a name for the devil. It represents primal evil and tempts the boys just as Satan tempted Christ.

Research Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative and textual analysis method. The main text used is William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* (1954). The novel was read closely to identify key themes, characters, and symbols. Important scenes dialogues, and descriptions were noted and interpreted. The study focuses on thematic Analysis to understand themes like civilization vs savagery, loss of innocence, and mob mentality Character and Symbol Analysis to see how characters and objects represent bigger ideas about human nature. Contextual Study to connect the novel with Golding's post-World War II background. Critical essays, class notes, and literary articles were also referred to support the interpretation. In short, this research is based on reading, interpreting, and analyzing the novel to understand Golding's message about human nature.

Result

Based on analysis of text and symbolism, three key results emerge:

1. **Civilization is Artificial:** Order requires rules, effort, and self-control. Without them, humans revert to tribalism and violence.
2. **Evil is Internal:** The novel rejects the idea of an external monster. The true beast is human nature. As Simon says, the darkness is within.
3. **Society Suppresses, Not Removes, Savagery:** The boys are not "turned" evil by the island. The island simply removes the social structures that were holding their instincts in check.

The novel thus functions as both political allegory and psychological study. Ralph vs Jack is democracy vs dictatorship. Piggy vs Roger is reason vs brutality. Simon vs the *Lord of the Flies* is good vs evil.

Conclusion

Lord of the Flies is not just a story about boys on an island. It is a warning about humanity. Golding uses allegory to show that without laws, empathy, and moral courage, we quickly descend into fear and violence. The death of Piggy and Simon, the shattering of the conch, and Ralph's final weeping all point to the same conclusion: the capacity for evil exists in everyone. Civilization is what keeps it buried.

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